

National Library of Scotland to celebrate centenary this year

**The National Library of Scotland
will celebrate its 100th birthday
with a full year long birthday
programme of events.**

- There will be a Nationwide Love Libraries campaign focusing on showing love to a local library from Valentine's Day onwards.
- Authors Val McDermid and Damian Barr are now Centenary Champions
- The major exhibition opening in June 2025 this year is "Dear Library" which will show what people love about books and reading
- Mary Queen of Scots last letter will go on display in Perth Museum, leaving NLS for the first time in a generation. This is part of a centenary loan programme and other items from the national collection (which has more than 50 million items in it) will go to Aberdeen and Shetland.
- The programme will be launched at a Curtain Raiser on 28 March



Authors and Centenary Champions Damian Barr and Val McDermid and at the unveiling of The National Library Centenary Programme.

PHOTO Neil Hanna

National Librarian Amina Shah said: “A century ago, we were established in the spirit of egalitarianism, where our founders – including Sir Alexander Grant – held the firm belief that the people of Scotland deserved a national library to call their own, one which anyone living here could access. The Act of Parliament states that we exist to collect and preserve the national collections, and make them accessible to the public through our reading rooms, exhibitions and other means of engaging people with Scotland’s culture and heritage.

“We increased our efforts to reach more and new people with the collections in recent years with great success, and our intention is to accelerate this during the year of our 100th birthday by working in partnership with Scotland’s network of amazing libraries. And so, I’m delighted to announce our

centenary programme – a nationwide libraries campaign, our major exhibition, our national tour – all of which have the potential to connect with every individual across the country. It is our ambition that the impact our centenary programme will have on communities throughout Scotland will continue far beyond 2025.”

When it was established, the National Library was endowed with the non-legal aspects of the Faculty of Advocates’ collections, ultimately making it the holder of the largest collection of antiquarian books north of Cambridge.

The Library was also established as a legal deposit library, meaning it has the right to claim a copy of everything published in the UK. This right remains today, and includes digital publications. While the National Library was awaiting a home, it started life in the Faculty of Advocates building. Work began on the George IV Bridge site in the 1930s, but due to the Second World War, most of the building work took place in the 1950s. Queen Elizabeth II officially opened the new National Library building in Edinburgh in July 1956.

Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, said: “The National Library of Scotland has been a cornerstone of our nation’s cultural life for a century, preserving and sharing Scotland’s remarkable and complex history. For 100 years, through successive Acts of Parliament and the continued support of the Scottish Government, it has safeguarded our written and recorded heritage, from ancient manuscripts to the digital content of today.

“With more than 50 million items in its expert care, freely accessible to everyone, the National Library is one of Scotland’s most precious national institutions. Supporting our languages, reflecting our communities, and protecting our past and present for all those who will come after us. As we mark this centenary, we celebrate not just a building or a collection, but a century of protecting our national library

and sharing the knowledge, creativity, and memories of Scotland for generations to come.”

Damian Barr said: “I believe that stories are for everybody and everybody has a story. My local library saved my life – it gave me a warm, safe place to be and the books were my passports to other worlds. These books helped me change my own story. I was encouraged and supported in my reading by skilled librarians who always found me the right book at the right time. I was a reader long before I was a writer – that’s how every writer starts. The National Library is the home of Scotland’s stories and everybody is welcome, whatever their story.”

Fellow Centenary Champion, author Val McDermid, said: “My parents couldn’t afford books but they understood they were the passport to better life chances than they’d had. But it’s not just writers who have their doors opened to the wider world by libraries. Engineers, lawyers, builders, artists, geographers, mathematicians, musicians... the list is endless. Libraries open windows that let us all fly.”

The Centenary Programme has been kindly supported by the Garfield Weston Foundation, the NLS Foundation, The William Grant Foundation, CILIPS Research Fund and Alex Graham and all funds raised by the National Library’s Centenary Appeal, which launched earlier this month, will go towards funding the ‘Outwith’ programme.

Consultation on the National Library’s 2025–2030 strategy, called ‘The Next Chapter’, begins today and runs until end March.

To find out more about what’s on at The National Library of Scotland in its centenary year, please visit <https://www.nls.uk/whats-on/>

To support the National Library’s Centenary Appeal, please visit <https://www.nls.uk/centenary-appeal/>

To find out more about the National Library's 2025–2030 strategy consultation, please visit <https://www.nls.uk/about-us/what-we-do/our-strategy/strategy-consultation/>



National Librarian Amina Shah (2nd right) was joined by Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, National Library Chair, Sir Drummond Bone and authors and Centenary Champions Damian Barr and Val McDermid at the unveiling of the National Library Centenary Programme.

PHOTO Neil Hanna